

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

S E C R E T TEHRAN 4341

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

SUBJ: IRAN-SAUDI ARABIAN RELATIONS

REFS: (A) TEHRAN 4087; (B) JIDDA 3235

1. WE ARE PLEASED TO LEARN THAT SAUDIS ALSO FEEL SHAH'S RECENT VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA HELPED TO STRENGTHEN IRAN-SAUDI RELATIONS. WE AGREE WITH JIDDA THAT ULTIMATELY, HOWEVER, THESE RELATIONS WILL DEPEND ON PERCEIVED MUTUAL SELF-INTEREST. WE WERE SURPRISED THEREFORE THAT JIDDA SEEMS TO FIND SOME DARKER MEANING IN SOME OF THE REMARKS THE SHAH MADE ABOUT THESE AND OTHER AREA MATTERS REPORTED REFTEL A.

2. IN OUR VIEW THE SHAH AND, WE BELIEVE, SADAT HAVE AN EXCELLENT APPRECIATION OF THE DELICACIES OF AREA ALLIANCES PARTICULARLY AS THEY MAY INVOLVE IRAN AND THAT WE CAN EXPECT THAT THEY WILL HANDLE THEIR GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH SUITABLE TACT AND SUBTLETY. CERTAINLY AT THIS JUNCTURE OF CAIRO'S SUBSTANTIAL DEPENDENCE ON EXTERNAL AID NEITHER WOULD WANT TO JEOPARDISE THE CONTINUATION OF SAUDI LARGESS. WHEN THE SHAH SPOKE OF IRAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS DEVELOPING CLOSE TO THE FORMATION OF AN "AXIS" I TOOK HIM TO MEAN THAT HE HOPED BOTH COUNTRIES COULD WORK TOGETHER BECAUSE THEY SHARED SIMILAR VIEWS AND POLICIES. I DID NOT TAKE IT TO MEAN THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RELATIONSHIP
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SHIP COULD IN ANY WAY BE TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER INTERESTS, CONCERNS OR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE AREA. INDEED, AS IS WELL KNOWN, THE SHAH HAS WORKED ASSIDUOUSLY AND FREQUENTLY OVER THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS WITH

OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO DEVELOP CLOSER TIES WITH HIS PERSIAN GULF NEIGHBORS. THAT THESE EFFORTS HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL HERETOFORE STEMMED IN PART FROM FAISAL'S RELUCTANCE, THE TIMIDITY OF OTHER ARABIAN PENINSULA RULERS LACKING A CLEAR GO AHEAD FROM RIYADH, AND IRAN-IRAQI DIFFERENCES. NOW THAT FAISAL IS GONE AND IRAN AND IRAQ HAVE COMPOSED MANY OF THEIR DIFFERENCES, THE PROSPECTS OF CLOSER AREA COOPERATION SEEM MUCH MORE PROMISING. INDEED, SADDAM HUSSEIN IS NOW AGGRESSIVELY PROMOTING THE IDEA OF AN AREA MUTUAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENT WITH FAVORABLE SOUNDS BEING HEARD FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF THE GULF. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE THESE TRENDS WITH THE CREATION OF A TEHRAN-CAIRO AXIS WHICH THE SAUDIS COULD ONLY SEE AS DESIGNED TO "SKEWER THE KINGDOM".

3. SINCE WE FIND IT IMPROBABLE THAT THE SHAH AND SADAT WOULD CONCERT IN WAYS WHICH THE SAUDIS FOUND TREATENING, WE ALSO FIND THE CONCEPT OF A COUNTER RIYADH-BAGHDAD-DAMASCUS AXIS DEVELOPING REMOTE. A MAJOR RESERVATION ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE, HOWEVER, IN THE EVENT A QADHAFFI-TYPE GOVERNMENT WERE TO SURFACE IN SAUDI ARABIA. THE EMERGENCE OF SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD NATURALLY BE OF CONCERN TO THE SHAH, PRESUMABLY TO SADAT AND MAYBE A NUMBER OF OTHER STATES AS WELL. WE COULD REASONABLY EXPECT THAT COUNTRIES THAT SHARED CONCERN OVER SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD COUNSEL TOGETHER ABOUT WHAT MIGHT BE DONE. TO SUGGEST HOWEVER THAT THE SOLUTION WOULD BE FOUND IN AN IRANIAN TAKEOVER SEEMS AS REMOTE TO US AS A US TAKEOVER. IT WOULD BE MORALLY INTOLERABLE AND PRACTICALLY INFEASIBLE AND THERE IS NOTHING THAT THE SHAH HAS EVER SAID WHICH WOULD SUGGEST HE WOULD THINK OTHERWISE.

4. ONE RELATIVELY MINOR FOOTNOTE ABOUT THE SHAH'S REACTION TO KHALID AND THE APPARENT DIFFERING VERSIONS OF WHAT HE TOLD THE UK AND AMERICAN AMBASSADORS ABOUT IT, WE CAN ONLY STATE OUR FIRM BELIEF THAT WHILE THE SHAH HAS HIS SHARE OF EGO HE IS ALSO A SHREWD AND PERCEPTIVE JUDGE OF
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TALENT. IT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT HIS HEAD MIGHT HAVE BEEN TURNED BY A BIT OF SAUDI FLATTERY. THE SHAH HAS BEEN CHARMED BY THE BEST WITH NO DISCERNABLE EFFECT ON HIS RUNNING HIS COUNTRY AND ITS FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN A WAY IN WHICH HE CONCEIVES IT TO BE IN THE COUNTRY'S BEST INTERESTS.
HELMS

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